

Church of the First Presbyterian Society
Chenango St.
Binghamton
Broome County
New York

HABS No. NY-5564

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18-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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CHURCH OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN SOCIETY OF BINGHAMTON

Location: 42 Chenango Street, Binghamton, Broome County, New York.

Present Owner: Susquehanna Valley Presbytery.

Present Occupant: First Presbyterian Society of Binghamton.

Present Use: House of worship.

Brief Statement of Significance: A visual and cultural landmark in Binghamton, the First Presbyterian Church is a well designed Romanesque Revival building that has not had any significant alterations since it was built.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:
 - 1817 - Congregation organized.
 - 1820 - First church building erected on present church lot.
 - 1862 - March 12, 1862, Church destroyed by fire with nearly completed adjacent new church (begun 1860).
 - 1863 - April 26, 1863, present church dedicated.

The following is an account of the church's history written in 1900 by William S. Lawyer (See Bibliography): "The church steadily increased in membership, and in 1819 on the site of the present church edifice on Chenango Street was erected the first house of worship, a frame structure, 40' x 40' in dimensions. In 1843, it became necessary to enlarge the edifice, and again in 1848 it was voted to erect a new house of worship. The work was at once begun and in two years the new sanctuary was completed. It was of brick, in Romanesque style, 80' wide and 130' long, and was designed to seat 1,200 persons. Sunday, March 13, 1862, was appointed as the dedication day of the new edifice, but on the night before this anticipated event, about 10 o'clock, an alarm of fire was heard through the village, and on Sunday morning the new Presbyterian church was in ashes. It a staggering blow and men's hearts failed for the moment; but the children began to act while the men paused, and soon throughout the entire congregation was kindled a greater

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fire of devotion and energy which ceased not to burn until the ruined structure was rebuilt and dedicated April 26, 1863. In 1870, the spacious chapel was erected. It contained lecture and Sunday school rooms, parlors and other conveniences for the greater usefulness of the Church. In 1885, and again about 10 years later, the main edifice was improved and beautified."

2. Date of erection: 1862-1863.
3. Architect: J.J. Lyon of New York City.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: In The Annals of Binghamton (See Bibliography) the new church, before being destroyed by fire, but presumably as it was rebuilt, was described as: "built of brick, in the Romanesque style, and had an audience-room ninety feet in length, not including the recess for the pulpit, by sixty-five [sic] feet in breadth. It was designed to accommodate about twelve hundred persons. The entire length of the building was one hundred and thirty feet; the breadth, including the towers of the front angles, a little more than eighty; the height of the spire something more than two hundred and thirty-two."

It is assumed that the same contractor, Hodge & Baldwin, and the same decorators, Nowlan & Kearing of New York, that were employed for the first new church were also retained for the rebuilding after the fire. A.T. Steware & Company, New York, furnished the carpets and upholstery and the organ was erected by E. and G.S. Hook of Boston.

5. Alterations and additions:
1870 - "north transept" built containing chapel, lecture and Sunday school rooms, parlors, and other facilities.
1906 - children's chapel constructed.

No major alterations or remodeling done to Church edifice.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

There have been no events and persons associated with this building that merit special historical significance, but the structure and its history have been of considerable local importance. The beauty of the edifice and the energy of the congregation in rebuilding it in the face of destruction of the new undedicated structure and in the midst of the Civil War is an event which has become a notable item of local history. The old building was only half-covered by insurance.

C. Sources of Information:

Bibliography:

Barnes, Dorothy E. Heritage, A History of the First Presbyterian Church. 90 pp, Published by the Church. Binghamton, 1963.

Seward, William F. Binghamton and Broome County, New York: A History. Vol. I, p. 321. Lewis Hist. Pub. Co., New York & Chicago, 1924.

Smith, H.P. History of Broome County. D. Mason & Company, Syracuse, 1885. p. 233.

- D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Mrs. Orton Barnes of Binghamton is officially making a study of the church records for purposes of classification and indexing, following her recent research published as Heritage. It is possible that she may find further information of interest during this project.

Prepared by Clement C. Bowers
Binghamton, New York
June 30, 1963

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation of structures in the Southern Tier of New York State, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Broome County Historical Society and the Valley Development Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The historical material was prepared by Clement G. Bowers in June, 1963. Photographs were taken by Jack E. Boucher in March, 1963. The project was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Constance Werner Ramirez, November, 1974.